

SPEAK UP

Kelly Atwood asked these employees of East Mississippi Community College, "What is your favorite Rev. Rush story?"

"When I worked the switchboard in the administration building, each morning I could see the day security officer raising the American flag. Rev. Rush would always raise the flag and then salute it in proper military fashion. It was a powerful image and always touched my heart."

Joanne Buchanan, shipping and receiving clerk



Buchanan

"I can't think of a specific incident or story involving Rev. Rush, but he is the kind of person who adds a little something special to an ordinary day. He's like a burst of sunshine — greeting everyone with a bright smile and a warm disposition. Though he is small in stature and soft-spoken, he commands great respect from the students and employees at EMCC. We are glad to have him home."

Roxanne Murray, coordinator for sponsored programs and research



Murray

"When I think of Rev. Rush, I think of his quiet, gentle manner in dealing with the students. When young men would be about to get into trouble, he would give them warnings. Because of his way of handling things, he gets results without provoking anger. He has a humble spirit, but he commands respect and attention. Brother Rush wears 'the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit which is in the sight of God in great price.' 1 Peter 3:4."

Mary M. Smith, special populations coordinator



Smith

SPEAK UP

Why did you participate in DeKalb's Welcome Home event?

Marcy Montgomery: "We felt like we needed to make the banner because we wanted to show that we support our troops. They were very much missed, and we wanted them to know that we consider them family. We hope all the troops can come home soon, and we keep them in our prayers."

Marcy Montgomery made a large welcome home banner on behalf of East Mississippi Community College.



Montgomery

Juanice Evans: "I just love the military. I don't think people realize what they do for us, what they give up for our freedom. That's why we are free to choose where we can go to church. Since we did the Kemper County Chamber of Commerce Veterans Memorial Walk, I've heard so many stories from many wars. When we did the walkway, we had Vietnam veterans say, 'Finally, someone has done something for us.'"

Juanice Evans chaired the Welcome Home events.



Evans

Jennifer Hull: "My husband, three children and I were there to welcome home Charles Westerfield, line foreman for EMEPA, and tell him how glad we were to have him home safely. I was also able to speak to Rev. Rush and Prentiss Steele, security guards at EMCC. My heart swelled with pride for the job well done by 'our own' and I was touched by the sentiment our community expressed at their homecoming. As I left the National Guard Armory, I took a picture of the yellow ribbon tied to the old tree in front of the Armory and thought about how blessed we are to have our troops home."



Hull

Tyran Jimison: "I made a sign that said, 'Welcome back, mom. I love you.' When my mom was gone, I was sad, and I just cried it out. When she came back, she told me she loved me. Every day, we eat together and I talk about what I did in school. I'm glad to have my momma back. To the other kids who have mothers in the military, I hope your momma makes it back home safely."

Tyran Jimison is a fourth-grader at East Kemper Elementary School. His mother, Aretha Jimison, is a member of the 367th Maintenance Company.

Rev. Rush returns home to EMCC

Kelly Atwood is public information director of East Mississippi Community College. She is also the college's newspaper and yearbook adviser. Kelly lives on the EMCC campus in Scooba with her husband, Russ Farris, three cats and one dog.

By Kelly Atwood
special to The Star

Everyone at East Mississippi Community College knows campus security officer Melvin Rush — we all call him "Rev. Rush."

We were saddened to see him leave for Iraq, but when I found out his son, Melvin Jr., was also going, I couldn't help but think how hard it must be for Rev. Rush's wife.

"It was really, really hard," said Arme Rush. "Half the time I didn't sleep. It's not easy being back on this end. I thank the Lord for getting me through it."

The Rev. Melvin Rush and his son, Melvin Rush Jr., both members of the Mississippi Army National Guard's 367th Maintenance Company, Detachment 1, came home in Nov. after 15 months of deployment.

"One of the hardest parts is being separated from family," said Rush Sr. "When you love someone, you don't want to tell them the worst, so you don't know just how things are going back home."

Rush Sr. worked in small arms repair and, because he is a minister, conducted the 12 o'clock services. His son worked as a wheeled vehicle mechanic. Although the two didn't see each other during work hours, they were together the rest of the time.

"It's wonderful having someone from your family there so you can take care of each other and watch each other's back — but when mortars are falling, as a father, you're concerned for your son because he's not right there with you," said Rush Sr.

"I was more happy to have him there than anything else."



SUBMITTED PHOTO

FATHER AND SON

Rev. Rush, left, and his son Melvin Rush Jr., are congratulated by security chief Rodney Woodards during a ceremony Feb. 11 at East Mississippi Community College. The ceremony was sponsored by their employer, Gemini Security, and they were each given certificates in honor of their service to our country. Also pictured are security officer Felicia Spencer and Napoleon Jones, EMCC assistant director of career-technical programs.

care packages from his churches, Beulah Missionary Baptist Church and Mt. Sinai Missionary Baptist Church. Some of the items much appreciated by the soldiers were baby wipes, snacks, cold cream and puzzle books for the down time. Rev. Rush kept busy by visiting the people of the area.

"I had a chance to work with the local nationals," said Rush Sr. "They were inquisitive about our version of the Bible, and I was able to discuss scripture with them and exchange Biblical ideas."

Spreading the work

The U.S. soldiers built a chapel in the Muslim territory of Mosul, where the Rushes' unit was stationed.

"The chapel was beautiful. I felt like Jonah carrying the gospel to Nineveh," Rush said.

"There's a lot of good being done, but the media shows only the bad. There were a lot of locals happy that we were there. We bought local merchandise and helped boost their economy. The spread of the gospel is

happening there. The cultural and spiritual exchange is actually beneficial."

Rev. Rush said that, in 1991, the Lord told him he would be going to war.

"The Lord told me I wouldn't participate in the Gulf War, but I would be going to war later and everything would be all right because it was in his plan," Rush said.

"I'm convinced that one way or another, despite who was president, we would have been there because it was destined."

Mrs. Rush said that her husband had shared this with her many years ago. When his unit was called up, "He repeated to me many times that God said everything would be all right. He told me that he may have been taken from preaching over here, but he was sharing the gospel over there."

Rush said that what he missed the most was family, his church family and home cooking.

"I wish there were enough words to express what it's like to be home, but all I can say is, it's great."

And we are all so happy you are back, Rev. Rush.

Calling home

Rush Sr. and his wife have two other children and 11 grandchildren. Both of the Rushes in the unit called home when they could. The phone system would sometimes be down because they ran on generators.

"Sometimes it took three weeks for the phones to work, and we didn't know anything on this end," said Mrs. Rush. "I mailed stuff every day to him."

The Rev. Rush also received letters and

DeKalb welcomes home the 367th

By Kelly Atwood
special to The Star

DEKALB — On Nov. 24, a crowd of hundreds gathered to welcome home the Mississippi Army National Guard's 367th Maintenance Company, Detachment 1.

The families picked up their troop members from the bus, and then their cars were escorted by officers of the Mississippi Highway Patrol to the Kemper County line — where the sheriff began the escort. Volunteer fire departments also joined the escort.

"I was driving from Meridian to DeKalb and ended up behind the police escort of the bus bringing the soldiers home," Jennifer Hull said.

"Flags were waved by people standing in front of homes and country stores. Civilians paused their vehicles to allow emergency vehicles to join the escort. Hands of soldiers began to extend from the bus windows waving to all those who had pulled along the roadside. The escorted bus drove under flags extending from the bucket trucks of East Mississippi Electric Power Association. The homecoming for these soldiers was awesome."

The city of DeKalb was covered in signs welcoming the soldiers home.

"The troops saw signs everywhere," said Juanice

Evans, executive director of the Kemper County Chamber of Commerce. "Families had personal signs. There were signs done by the town of Scooba, by churches and schoolchildren. It was very, very touching."

Two of the men who returned were the Rev. Melvin Rush, and his son, Melvin Rush Jr.

The city held a program for the troops, with Rev. Melvin Rush's father, the Rev. Henry Rush, performing the invocation, former unit member and mayor of DeKalb Homer Hall speaking, Supervisor Johnny Whitsett speaking on behalf of Kemper County and Adjutant Gen. Harold Cross speaking on behalf of the troops. The Kemper-Neshoba Correctional Facility inmates sang "Time Served" for the troops.

A moment of silence was held for two members of the 367th who did not return — Joshua Ladd and Matthew Stovall.

After the program, the troops and their families enjoyed a lunch. One person who worked at getting the food ready was Cynthia Arthur, whose husband, James, is a member of the unit.

"James has been in the military for 39 years, so Cynthia has been through these welcome home events many times," Evans said.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

SIGNS AND BANNERS

The residents of DeKalb welcomed the 367th Maintenance Company home in style in November, when the unit returned from duty in Iraq. There were signs everywhere, said Juanice Evans, executive director of the Kemper County Chamber of Commerce. "Families had personal signs. There were signs done by the town of Scooba, by churches and schoolchildren. It was very, very touching."